

CURIOSITY AND LEARNING: 6 REASONS WHY STUDENTS SHOULD ASK WHY



By teacherCPDacademy.com

Have you ever been questioned by an inquisitive child, who responds to everything you say with “why?”, “why?” and “why?”? Sometimes you may not have all the answers, but curiosity and eagerness to learn are exactly what we should be nurturing in students.

Research shows that having a “hungry mind” is [one of the three key predictors of school achievement](#). It’s as important as intelligence. So, what is it that makes curiosity so great?

WHY SHOULD STUDENTS ASK “WHY”?

Learning

Asking “why” questions advances learning because it engages students in a topic. It forces them to think deeply about and listen to answers, developing curiosity. [Research suggests](#) that people who are curious about a topic tend to learn faster. This is because curiosity primes the brain for learning. It makes you motivated to learn, but also helps you to remember and recall learnt information better. In the classroom and at home, students can ask themselves questions like “why is this true?”. Pre-empting the answers to these questions helps students to progress their learning, [improving performance](#).

Critical thinking

Being curious and asking “why?” also helps students to develop a lens of critical thinking. This helps them to separate reliable information from untrustworthy information, rather than believing

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everything they hear. Again, challenging information forces students to engage more deeply in material, and this enhances their learning.

Self-reflection

Students should ask “why?” not only about topic content, but also towards themselves. Self-reflection improves their understanding of themselves and their learning process.

They can consider, for example, why they’re at their current performance level. Students who question themselves reveal gaps in their learning, which they can then fill. They identify their strengths and weaknesses, which they can then overcome. This challenges them to learn new things and push beyond their current level of ability. In this way, students who ask themselves “why?” develop their Growth Mindset. They believe they can improve their intelligence, ability and performance.

Feedback

This self-reflection process should extend to feedback. When students receive a piece of marked work, they should ask that question “why?” both to themselves and to the marker. This way, they don’t fixate on the grade itself, and can instead understand what led to that grade. They can find out what they did well, what they should carry on doing, but also what they could do better. Asking these questions helps students to get the most out of feedback. Accepting mistakes and seeing them as an opportunity to improve takes courage, but is a key way to boost the learning process.

For their own interest

As well as preparing the brain to learn, curiosity makes the sensation of learning more rewarding. Curious and inquisitive students find the learning process more enjoyable and satisfying. Research even shows that [students with high levels of curiosity have higher well-being](#). This is because their goals are no longer solely about performance, but more about personal growth. In other words, curious students have more intrinsic motivation,

where what motivates them is their own genuine interest, and future goals. Asking “why?” plays a part again here. Students can ask themselves why their work right now will help them to reach their goals.

Impressions

Finally, curiosity is important because of the impression it gives to others. Students who ask “why?” showcase their enthusiasm and interest in learning to others. Imagine that a student has an interview for a job or work experience. [Showing interest in the job](#) through questions and being curious to learn more is likely to impress. And it’s not just work relationships that curiosity improves: [this study](#) showed that curious people have more positive social interactions in general. So, students who show interest in and ask questions about other people are likely to develop better friendships and social relationships.

HOW TO GET STUDENTS TO ASK WHY

It’s clear that curiosity is something we should encourage in students. But, most [students don’t associate curiosity with school](#). Schools should strive to promote students’ curiosity and questioning abilities. They can do this in several ways:

- Teachers can model their own curiosities. This encourages students to take more risks in asking questions and exploring information.
- Providing daily opportunities for asking questions allows students to practice forming the questions they want to ask. And if teachers don’t have all the answers, this is fine. Helping students to find out what they want to know can be a more exciting way of learning.

Finally, we would encourage schools to consciously reward curiosity and self-reflection. Whether it leads to better grades or not, teachers and parents should praise students for demonstrating interest and motivation through asking “why?” questions.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Curious students engage in their learning more, tend to succeed in school, have strong social relationships, and better well-being. So, asking “why?” may sound simple, but its benefits are far reaching, helping students strive towards long-term goals and personal growth.